



Washington State Department of Agriculture News Release

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Contact: Jason Kelly (360) 902-1815

WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
P.O. Box 42560, Olympia, Washington 98504-2560
Visit our Web site at: agr.wa.gov

Group to investigate whether small dairies face barriers to licensing

OLYMPIA – Do very small dairies with less than 10 cows have difficulties meeting state licensing requirements? Can microdairies that offer unpasteurized milk or process artisan cheeses thrive as small businesses in Washington?

A workgroup of licensed small dairy operators, as well as industry and consumer advocates, will investigate what financial or regulatory barriers, if any, exist to starting a small milking or dairy processing operation, as well as solutions to knock down those barriers.

During its move to strengthen the state's dairy laws last session, the legislature heard public testimony about possible barriers and directed the Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA) to convene the workgroup. WSDA and the workgroup must report their findings and recommendations to the legislature by Dec. 1.

The workgroup includes small licensed pasteurized and raw milk producers, small cheese and yogurt manufacturers, larger dairy operators, public health officials, WSU extension agents, and industry and consumer advocates. The names of the 14 workgroup members are listed on the WSDA Web site at www.agr.wa.gov/FoodAnimal/Dairy.

According to WSDA licensing records, the number of small milking and dairy processing operations has seen a dramatic increase since a 2005 change in state law that allows hand-capping of milk bottles. The number of licensed unpasteurized milk producers has increased from one to more than a dozen in less than a year. Since March of this year, the number of licensed milk processing plants has increased by nearly 50 percent, with most of the new operations being small bottling, yogurt and cheese operations.

Under current state law, a dairy must obtain a free milk producer license to sell milk to a processing plant. If the dairy wants to bottle its own milk or make other dairy products, it is required to obtain a \$55 milk processing license. The licensing requirements stipulate that dairies and processing plants must meet sanitation requirements and that dairy animals must be tested for certain communicable diseases. WSDA offers technical assistance and guidance to those wishing to obtain these licenses.

Members of the public may identify problems or suggest solutions to the difficulties of obtaining milk producer or processing licenses by submitting written comments to workgroup coordinator Nancy Jordan at njordan@agr.wa.gov. Jordan, a community and business development expert, was raised on a dairy in Oregon and worked as a commercial and agricultural lender for 14 years.

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